IronWatch

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ABYSSAL TIDINGS

A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Welcome back to IRONWATCH Magazine! This month we've got a ton of fantastic content, including stories of GCPS encounters against the vile Veer-Myn, as well as stories of the Inquisition from the Star-Struck City, and more!

One thing we're truly excited to bring to your attention is the release of the Quarantine Basic Rules from Ironwatch Games! This spacecraft battle game pits capitol ships in the cold void of space, using the same base rules as Deadzone in order to provide a great, hard-science approach to movement and positioning without sacrificing fun or play speed. You can find out more about that on page 16, so please give it a shot and let us know what you think!

We're gradually making some behind-the-scenes changes that should help us enhance the quality and relevance of the pictures you see alongside the articles, but please remember we always love to accept more pictures to use! As with articles you'd like to submit, please send us any images for the magazine to ironwatchmagazine@gmail.com and we'd be more than happy to include them in future issues!

Lastly, the Ironwatch Annual Year One is slated to release sometime in the next month; we've collected feedback about how you viewers would like it formatted, and will be making sure we deliver the cream of the crop in terms of content for the Year One release. Following that will be the first Ironwatch Tales release, a collection of our fluff stories, so please send us feedback through our email or on our Facebook page as to whether you'd like Kings of War or Warpath stories to be the focus of the first Ironwatch Tales release. Thanks for reading, and Welcome to the Watch!

--Austin Peasley

Cover art by Boris Samec
Title art by Mark Peasley

Contact us and submit articles at:
ironwatchmagazine@gmail.com

If you find any errors, grammar mistakes, or rule imbalances, please contact us on the Mantic Forums (Look for the discussion labeled "Ironwatch Issue X Feedback") and let us know what we could do to improve your fan-produced magazine. If you are interested in writing, illustrating, or editing for our magazine, please let us know on the feedback discussion as well so you can get in on the action!

All models used in this publication are from the respective author's own personal collections, and any models displayed herein are not intended to challenge the status of the copyrights of their respective owners.

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THE IRON FORGE

Welcome back to the Iron Forge.

On display this month for you we have:

- Marcel Popik, with some outstanding Deadzone Forgefather Brokkrs and Valkyr
- Paul Welsh, with a stunning set of converted custom Varangur units, complete with custom lighting!

Keep tuned in next month for more fantastic models, and if you have some painted Mantic minis you'd like featured to possibly become an Iron Forge artist, please email high resolution photos of your miniatures to ironwatchmagazine@gmail.com.

Please include your name and/or Mantic forum name. You can also provide descriptions of your paint jobs and titles if you'd like!

Forgefather Dreadball Player by Chris Schlumpberger

MARCEL POPIK

BROKKR #1 & #2

MARCEL POPIK

BROKKR ON VALKYRIE

PAUL WELSH

PAUL WELSH

PAUL WELSH

PAUL WELSH

PAUL WELSH

MANTIC CALENDAR

If you have Mantic-related events or tournaments you'd like to add, please PM Matt Gilbert or Austin Peasley on the forums or **email us** with your event's date, time, location, cost, a brief description, and a URL for more information.

Please note that this list is not exhaustive and indicates where Mantic games are being enjoyed, not necessarily where Mantic will be making an official appearance (Save for the Mantic HQ, of course).

March

3/4 **Hammerhead**

From 10:00 AM to 4:30 PM

Tickets are £5 per adult, £3 for minors (16 and under), Children under 9 free

Every game at Hammerhead is visitor participation, which means that you are very welcome 'to have a go' at a wide variety of different historical and fantasy based games run by intrepid gaming clubs, historical societies, wargame companies and enthusiastic groups of gamers

The Showground, Lincoln Road, Winthorpe, Newark, Notts, NG24 2NY

Converted 'Bug' (counts-as Elves) cavalry by Daniel King

3/11 **AireCon**

From 6:00 PM on 3/11 to 6:00 PM on 3/13

Tickets are £23 per adult for all three days, with cheaper options available for partial-weekend passes, day passes, and youth passes.

AireCon is a friendly and inclusive analogue gaming festival in Harrogate International Centre. Whether you've come alone or with a massive group you'll find plenty of fun to be had and new friendly faces to meet.

Harrogate International Centre, King's Rd, Harrogate HG1 5LA, UK

Zombie Troll Shaman by "C.M. Minis"

3/22 **Adepticon 2017**

From 5:00PM on 3/22 to 4:00PM on 3/26

Weekend badges start at $25

We have expanded from a handful of events to well over 400 tournaments, event games, and hobby seminars covering all aspects of the miniature war gaming hobby. Despite the continued growth and necessary expansion, we have made every effort to keep consistent focus on one major priority: to present to our attendees the highest quality wargaming event possible

Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center, 1551 N. Thoreau Dr., Schaumburg, IL 60173, USA

April

4/1 **Teescon 2017**

From 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM

Teesside Wargames Convention, Eston Leisure Centre, Normanby Road, Middlesbrough, Middlesbrough TS6 9AE, UK

4/22 **Salute 2017**

From 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM

Tickets start at £12.00 online and £20.00 at the door.

Salute is the biggest independent one-day wargaming and gaming event in the UK. Our aim is to promote the very best in the hobby. Held at ExCel London, there will be the usual traders, with some from overseas as

well, along with plenty of demonstration and participation games to see and take part in.
ExCel London, Royal Victoria Dock, 1 Western Gateway, London E16 1XL, UK

4/28 **BrisCon 2017**
From 6:00 PM on 4/28 to 4:00PM on 4/30
Brisbane's Best Weekend of Gaming! BrisCon is looking to host a number of gaming competitions in 2017, and will host a Bring and Buy market for all gaming, hobby and related items. Kings of War is the premier fantasy wargaming system in QLD. Masses of ranked warriors battle, wizards and dragons fight, all in this superbly written rule-set. If you are interested, come along to our events on the 29th and 30th and have a go!
BrisCon, 68 Green Terrace, Windsor, Queensland, Australia.

4/28 **Lonewolf Tournament of Texas**
From 6:00 PM on 4/28 to 3:30PM on 4/30
Registration is $70.
The LoneWolf is a Kings of War grand tournament in the United States, with a rich history of epic competition, top notch players and some of the coolest trophies around. For more than fourteen years the tournament has been operating as one of the premiere wargaming tournaments in the south.
DFW Airport Marriot South, Main Ballroom, 4151 Centreport Boulevard, Fort Worth, Texas 76155, USA

May

5/6 **Mantic Open Day**
From 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM
Hear from the Mantic team, enjoy both games and painting activities, check out the new and upcoming releases, and more!
Mantic Games, 193 Hempshill Lane, Bulwell, Nottingham, NG6 8PF, UK

Looking for an event, but don't see it listed? We rely on the Mantic Calendar for events, so please either coordinate your event there or let us know directly if you have an event you'd like to have featured on the monthly Calendar!

Gridiron Tony by Darren Lysenko

QUARANTINE

We're proud to announce the second Ironwatch Game: Quarantine!

Set on the fringes of civilized space, Deadzone and Warpath are games of futuristic battles fought among the ruins of human colonies against a variety of alien threats. Quarantine represents the actions of the spaceships orbiting above the shrouded worlds.

Quarantine is played with model ships on a battlefield that is represented by a gaming mat. As a player you will take command of a squadron of vessels manned by the elite of human and alien spacefarers. Each turn you decide which of your models to move and what they will do, advancing through space and shooting at your enemies.

This is game is based off of Deadzone, and focuses on the Containment Protocol operations in space. It is designed as a set of simple to play space combat rules based around the Mantic system and should therefore be easy for Deadzone players to learn and add seamlessly into their games. The original concept was to add an insertion scenario at the start of a Warpath or Deadzone campaign and end it with a daring escape from the planet, whether the team plays heroic Rebs, steely-eyed Marauders, profit hungry Forge Fathers or even the malevolent Plague leaders intent on spreading the Contagion beyond the worlds they had already infected. Naturally the Enforcers will try to protect the rest of mankind from the risk of the Plague, even if they have to kill a significant number of people to do so.

What we're posting now is the basic rules; Behind the scenes, we're working on a "deluxe"/full version complete with stories from Ironwatch issues, pictures, and art from artist Boris Samec. The deluxe version will also be available for free, and we'll be putting up the deluxe version for printing off of Lulu at-cost if you would like a hard copy as well.

Can you man the helm and survive the enemies you'll face in the unfeeling void?

Come get the Basic Rules for Quarantine here!

THE WALKING DEAD: ALL-OUT WAR SHOWCASE

By Andrew Schaffert

A little bit about me, I have been painting miniatures for 2 years now. I dabbled with table top games in the past and got really into painting when I entered my first contest two years ago; I have been hooked ever since. I use a combination of airbrush, oils, and acrylic paints in my work. I saw a demonstration of All Out War at a convention I did a piece for, and although I am not much of a gamer, this one caught my interest. My wife and I have been playing it non-stop.

About this particular project.

I created the cars from $5.99 CVS pull back toys ranging in different scales from 1:35 to 1:48. I masked off the windows, re-primed them and went to town detailing them. I started with a base of oranges, reds, and browns and then applied AK Interactive's chipping medium over it. After airbrushing the top layer, I used distilled water and

gently brushed away the chips where I wanted them. After that, I added rust streaks using oil paints and a small dab, literally half of a water bottle cap full, of turpenoid to thin them out and get a realistic effect (I avoid turpentine or mineral spirits although they smell terrific?). Finally I added small highlights on the chips to "pop" them out and give a three dimensional feel. You can see a before and after of a toy car to the right.

The barriers I made from scraps I had in my bitz piles. The oil drums may have been from an old Tamiya kit or something (the box has been

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7-2

lost to the sands of time). Obviously, the pallets I made from balsa wood (no secret there), I sculpted the sand bags, and the steel bars I made from excess sprue (I may be a bit of a cheap skate, but seriously it is the perfect texture for steel beams).

The supply kits were made from an old Tamiya accessory pack.

I made the road signs from the plastic that comes in blister packs and thick gauge steel wire. The plastic makes a perfect facsimile for sheet metal at a small scale. I used the same weathering process as I did on the cars to give them a patina. I also used some old decals I had laying around (of course Valhalla is a tribute to the great Fury Road film; WITNESS ME!).

The trash strewn about I made by printing small newspaper pages to .25" size and then printing them out in small sheets. I stained the sheets and then crinkled them up to look like garbage. If you look close enough you can see that one the headlines read "The Dead Walks" and there is a Casablanca newspaper ad; they are so small I am not sure you can see them in the pictures!

The characters themselves I did mostly with airbrush. I worked from small parts to large areas, masking off the respective layers with blu-tac and then continuing. I would mask off the smallest areas first like hands and faces, and then mask larger areas like shirts and vests, and do the legs last (generally the largest areas). Although tedious, it produced excellent results, and I am quite quick with it now. I start with a base color between a highlight and a shade, then highlight from above, then shade from underneath (pretty standard airbrushing). For large amounts of minis I go for a zenith lighting. After the airbrush was complete, I highlighted further with a brush making the textures "pop" as much as possible.

If you have any more questions about any of my processes please let me know. I really enjoy the game but I am not entirely sure how to write battle reports (I am a humble painter, and I leave the strategy to the generals).

It is a pleasure to meet you all, and I hope to hear from you soon!▪

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99
20
VALHALLA

Orc Flagger by Jonathan Faulkes

THE BATTLE OF CROWBURG GROVE

By "BAE"

Chikuaq looked down and stared at the blade in his scaled hand. The simplicity of its design belied the quality of its supreme craftsmanship. Its handle was molded to sit perfectly when tightly gripped and arced into a viciously sharp edge in a single, solid piece of magmite steel. He had used it in countless battles to fell innumerable foes since it was forged at the heart of the Three Kings, but still the weapon was as keen as the day he had first lifted it from the master blacksmith's fires. He wondered whether Tepotzil was still practicing his art, surrounded by those pools of bubbling lava from which the products of his craft were made. He remembered the rows of axes hanging from the cavern ceiling, waiting for their third and final tempering. And being led to the pit from which this killing tool was to be pulled. The drawing of this blade from the seething fires was the culmination of many years of excruciating training, from his birth in the spawning pool right through to adulthood and the right to wield a weapon and fight for his race. He remembered pushing his hand into the thick, searing liquid to press his unique imprint into the shape of the handle, then drawing it out carefully but surely until he could feel the full weight unsupported by the pit from which it had been born. It had been years since he had seen Tepotzil or the fiery peaks of the Three Kings, he realized. It never seemed that long until you thought about it.

The sounding of great war drums and horns from across the undulating landscape snapped him back to the present. As the earth rumbled from the orcs starting their advance, Chikuaq relaxed and allowed the military training ingrained into his very fiber assert itself. Feet shoulder width apart, one foot slightly behind the other, knees bent, arms wide, stance ready. He imagined his homeland and what he was fighting for, and how much his orc opponents were a vile antithesis to everything he found sacred. The building rage of his burning hot core flooded his entire being, singeing the grass around his feet and causing a thin smoke to exude from his nostrils. Pure, violent heat coursed through his veins and limbs, his palm heating the handle and then

blade to white hot. A thin, keening sound from the blade grew louder and louder as the sheer amount of energy being imbued into the blade reached its limit. Chikuaq screamed a hiss as the anger built, and as the twin sounds transformed into an ear-piercing screech, the sword burst suddenly into flame, roaring and spitting its readiness for battle. By this point, smoke was billowing from his nose and mouth, his inside a raging inferno, perfectly ready for the battle ahead. Although Chikuaq had been briefed on the battle strategy by a ghekkotah runner, there was little need to have done so considering his experience. He looked left and right at the front rank of his regiment, each salamander waiting patiently for his command. Raising his weapon arm to the skies, the sword now acted as a flaming beacon indicating to his regiment to ready themselves for action. Bringing it down swiftly in the direction of the enemy, the unit started marching forward in unison.

A deluge of hulking green savages wielding crudely constructed axes was flowing towards the full width of the salamander battle line. Across to his right, in the middle of the field, a horde of greenskins carrying especially huge, spiked axes was building its

Orc Axes by Darren Lysenko

Orc Axes by Guiseppe Aquino

momentum towards the center. Looming behind the mass of orcs, lumbering trolls in skin loincloths flailed small boulders strapped to broken tree branches as though they were already engaged with the enemy. Screeches and snarls and bawls rose from the writhing plague like a thousand wolves calling to the moon, yet despite this wall of noise Chikuaq could still hear the deep booming of war drums emanating from somewhere within. His nose twitched with the stench of unclean, sweating, muscular bodies, covered in streaks of rotting blood from previous foes which travelled the length of the battlefield long before the orc front line. Behind all of this, a huge giant; a mountain of bone, sinew and flesh; loomed over all. Although the beast carried an entire tree as a weapon, Chikuaq knew that it was just as adept at stomping, punching and biting anything that stood in its path. The krudger that commanded the army was no doubt somewhere near the giant. Krudgers may have reached the top of orc society, if it could ever be called that, but that didn't entail any refinement; they still derived the same sick enjoyment from watching pain inflicted on others, and a giant was guaranteed to deliver.

On his own side, a swarm of ghekkotah carrying shields and shortspears made up the majority of the front line. Although nearly the size of a human, these amphibians looked tiny compared to the bulk of both orcs and salamanders. Their movement seemed chaotic but Chikuaq could see their many head crests displaying a bewildering myriad of changing colors as they communicated to organize rough battle lines. On their own he would have worried that they would be too weak to stem the sheer strength of the oncoming creatures, but towering above them all in the center

was a hulking ankylodon. The monstrous reptilian beast crushed the ground with each ponderous step, the long horns protruding from its forehead and spiny protrusions down its sides shaking with each impact. The wooden platform on its back carried blowpipe-wielding ghekkotah peering over the side to survey the scene below. Ankylodons had long been in service to salamander armies and as such Chikuaq knew the devastating power that they could deliver. Behind this formidable front line, a horde of salamander unbloodeds readied themselves to charge through the ghekkotah once the latter had stemmed the orc advance. Although these salamanders had passed their rigorous training they had not yet fought enough battles to prove themselves, so fighting alongside them was the battle captain leading the army, Melathaq. On the flanks were two stronger, more experienced units; a regiment of highly decorated ceremonial guard across to the right and his own unit of salamander warriors to the left. These would defeat their respective opponents and wheel inwards, forcing the orcs to fight in three directions. Finally, a salamander mage-priest, energy crackling all around him, was preparing himself just to the right of Chikuaq's warriors.

Due to their slightly larger frames, the orcs wielding the spiked axes in the center were pulling ahead of the rest of the line. Chikuaq was slightly relieved that his unit wasn't further to the middle; the fight between such strong brutes and the enormous ankylodon was going to be a thankless carnage. Still, all the ankylodon, ghekkotah and unbloodeds had to do was hold the line until the flanking units could rout their opponents and turn. Increasing his speed, he glanced across and saw the ghekkotah atop the ankylodon's howdah release a volley of blowpipe darts. A handful of the fastest orcs slammed into the ground holding their faces: the darts may not be enough to kill them, but the lethal poisons they were coated with would soon finish the job. A split-second later a huge ball of fire fizzed past the right of his unit, erupting in a massive explosion as it reached the opposing line, distributing green body parts far and wide. The screams of the wounded were drowned out by the baying roar of their fellow orcs, but not for long; they were quickly trampled into the ground by those behind.

As the centers of the lines came together, Chikuaq saw the bent and broken bodies of massive orcs being flung like ragdolls from the horned head of the ankylodon. The ghekkotah were faring a little worse against the superior physical might of the orcs. Although they were able to dart between

Goblin Wizard by Matt Gilbert

Orc Axes by Jonathan Faulkes

legs and stab rapidly in all directions, their front rank had been all but crushed under steel-capped boots.

Facing forwards once more he judged the distance still remaining: fifty yards, forty yards, thirty-five. At thirty he started to break into a run, his regiment still close either side but eerily silent save for the soft rumbling of footfall. Twenty-five yards. Running faster, the rumbling crescendoed, with a few of the more eager letting out angry hisses. And at twenty, all hell broke loose. His regiment erupted into a frenzy of rasping shrieks and hisses and bolted forwards as fast as they could. Sprinting with only a couple of yards to go, Chikuaq raised his flaming blade, screamed one last hiss and leapt into the raging torrent.

Landing solidly on both feet he threw two swift, downward swipes, one to the right, one to the left, catching the necks of both orcs immediately in front of him. Green-black blood oozed from the gaping wounds as they collapsed to the ground. Seeing a blade coming down at him from the right he parried, and then quickly reacted to deflect an axe being thrust like a sword by the orc behind those he had just felled. Trusting the regiment around him to deal with the attacker to his right Chikuaq lunged forwards and raised his sword parallel to the ground to block the axe that was now being brought down with almighty force at his head. The clash of the two weapons coming together caused a shower of fiery sparks from the flaming magmite steel. This unexpected burst caused the orc to falter for a split-second, giving Chikuaq time to grab the axe where the head was attached, pull it to the side and thrust his sword deep into the abomination's chest. From previous battles, Chikuaq knew the physical fortitude of his opponents. Even removing limbs would be highly unlikely to slow down an orc so each slash and thrust had to be aimed at killing in one blow. As he kicked the massive body of the dead orc off his blade a huge, steel-plated fist swung from the left and connected with Chikuaq's jaw. Stumbling

into the salamander to his right, he saw an axe following fast behind the fist. Being off balance he could not raise his sword in time, but a salamander jumped into the breach to block with his shield. This rash defense of the unit's leader cost the salamander dearly as the axe of another orc lodged itself deep into the warrior's right shoulder. Unable to maintain grip on his weapon, and with only a shield to defend himself, the disarmed salamander quickly fell prey to a flurry of blows.

By the time Chikuaq had steadied, he found himself in the second row of his regiment. He used the momentary respite to assess how the rest of the army was faring. The ghekkotah had taken heavy losses, but the ankylodon was still going strong. In most situations surrounding a beast was the surest way to take it down, but ankylodons were very much an exception to this rule. If an opponent was able to avoid being gored by the horns at the front, they then faced being trampled under huge, crushing feet. If this second danger was avoided, they finally faced a muscular tail, tipped with a heavy lump of bone decorated with yet more spiky protrusions which the beast could swing with deadly

Orc Kludger on Gore by Darren Lysenko

Goblin Mawbeast and handler by Guiseppe Aquino

accuracy. Chikuaq could see orcs piling in to attack the animal but very few were living long enough to strike. The ones that did were struggling to draw blood from the thick skin and were not standing long enough for a second attempt. The unbloodeds had moved through the ghekkotah and seemed to be holding the orc line admirably: if the battle went well he could see Melathaq promoting some of their number to full warrior status. The mage priest, careful to avoid friendly fire, was focusing his spells towards the trolls now starting to lope with increasing speed towards the swirling melee. Two fewer were standing than Chikuaq had counted at the start of the battle, and as he looked another fireball ripped through the air, striking a third directly in the chest. The force of the explosion threw the monster backwards, the entire front of its lifeless corpse a melted mess of burnt flesh.

A salamander fell to the ground, but Chikuaq did not move to fight the orc now facing him. Like a cat not knowing what to do until the mouse runs, even the orc paused in confusion. Heavy, dull thudding crescendoed into an earthquake. With a dawning realization of the cause, the orc slowly closed its eyes in acceptance of its fate. The troll let out a sound like a bellowed retch and burst through the orc ranks, crushing the solemn orc's skull sideways with a wild swing of its crude weapon. With its free hand, it grabbed a salamander's neck

and yanked. Wrapping its enormous, salivating mouth around the snout, it bit down hard with green, rotten teeth, wrenching broken flesh, teeth and bone free from their owner. It surged forwards, swinging its weapon at Chikuaq who was only just able to dodge. His warriors were palpably nervous, retreating slowly from the unhinged monster. Even the orcs had ceased their pressing attack, knowing that they were just as likely to receive a boulder to the face as any salamander if they came too close. Realizing the onslaught could quickly turn into a rout, Chikuaq readied himself, raised his sword and charged. A handful of his warriors followed his example and rushed forwards. The small boulder swung in a low arc, pulverizing two of them. Chikuaq and the remaining few slashed and hacked at the beast. Blood sprayed in all directions from its limbs but still it swung them, its fist sending another salamander sprawling. An axe bit into side of the troll's knee. Stumbling and yowling, the boulder came back in an instantly reply, smashing through the salamander's shield and hurling the wielder to the floor. Losing itself in a rage, the troll started pounding the limp body like a cook tenderizing meat with a mallet. Horrified by what was happening before him, it took Chikuaq a few seconds to react. Finally realizing that this was his chance, he darted behind the distracted troll and thrust his sword below the ribs and upwards towards the heart. It took the dumb animal a few seconds to understand what had happened. At first it tried to reach behind it's back to claw at the hilt. Then, gradually, it started to slow, tottering slightly as its arms lazily carried on in their objective. Finally, the mouth gurgled, the eyes rolled back, and the troll's face hit the ground.

Unable to yank the now extinguished sword from the body, Chikuaq rolled, deftly selecting the axe of a fallen comrade before leaping back to his feet. With the threat of the troll gone he had expected to find orcs swarming around him, but instead they were frantically shuffling backwards, hiding behind each other's shields. With the enemy wavering and on the brink of fleeing, Chikuaq bellowed his order without having to think.

"Charge!"

Goblin War Trombone by Claudia Zuminich

Orc Fight Wagons by Jonathan Faulkes

As he leant forward to start his run his mind punched him in the gut with the realization that something was wrong. The orcs had not fared so badly that they should be running yet. And their faces. However gnarled and hard to read they were, they were not the faces of the fearful or frightened. What was meant to be a run turned into a few fallen steps as he stared at the front rank of orcs, looking for clues. While most of his unit noticed Chikuaq's hesitance, checked their advance and stood ready, a couple of quicker salamanders raced ahead and were swiftly hacked down. A large orc wearing a tattered kepi broke into a wide grin as his blood red eyes met Chikuaq's. Having opened a gap of about thirty feet, the orcs halted and Chikuaq noticed an odd sound coming from his left. Terror clenched his throat as three boar-pulled chariots exploded over the crest of a small ridge to their left and came hurtling down. The clattering, squealing contraptions bristled with jagged steel, the wheels transforming some of the protrusions into mincing machines. In an instant, the chariots were upon them. Body parts flew, chaos and blood spewing in all directions. Wails of agony falsettoed over a chorus hysterical screams as his regiment started to flee from the onslaught. One of the chariots churned past Chikuaq, an orc rider following through with a mace. As the whirling spikes mangled themselves into his leg, the mace crunched into his shoulder. Incapacitated by pain, he dropped to the ground. Shaking violently as he struggled to get back up, he collapsed again immediately as his left leg gave way beneath him. Still refusing to give up, Chikuaq tried to roll on to his back by pushing with the one arm still working, but his quivering limb could not shift the weight of his body. Slumping back down he wallowed in pools of muddied earth and blood. 'Why here?', he thought as the pain started to fade like a distant memory, 'I want to go home'. His eyes became heavy, the world started to slow, and then there was nothing.▪

CLASH OF KINGS AUSTRALIA: BEST PAINTED ARMY

By Ben Rantall

My Abyssal Dwarf army "The Abyss't of Frinds" was the recent winner of the Best Painted Mantic Army at the Australian Clash of Kings 2017.

The name of the army came from the Abyssal allies that are present: the Abyssal dwarfs and Forces of the Abyss seemed like they should be "best of friends". Using my powers of command over the English language, I deformed both words to that which suited… plus, it's fun to say.

This 2000 pt. army is made of:

- 2 troops of Gargoyles
- 1 troop of Slave Orcs
- 1 regiment of Lesser Obsidian Golems (with

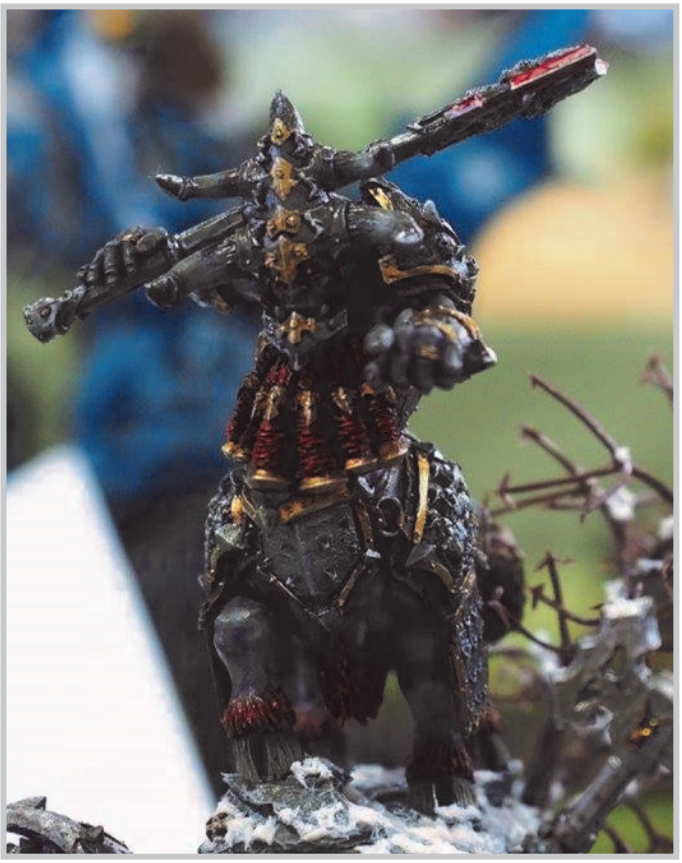
War-bow of Kaba)
•1 regiment of Abyssal Halfbreeds (with Brew of Haste)
•1 horde of Abyssal Grotesques (with Potion of the Caterpillar) [Forge world bull centaurs as Mantic doesn't yet produce these]
•1 Greater Obsidian Golem
•1 Ironcaster (with surge and Inspiring talisman)
•1 Abyssal Halfbreed Champion (with quicksilver rapier)
•Ba'su'su the Vile

Allied with:
•1 regiment of Flamebearers
•1 Archfiend of the Abyss (with wings)

The archfiend was a kit-bash I made years ago and love, but rarely sees the table, so you could say that he was the inspiration for the entire army. It's made up of bits and pieces from various manufacturers.

There are also small conversions throughout the army: Ba'su'su is holding the head of a recent victim, two Flamebearers were promoted to "Brazierbearers", the gargoyles had been removed from their standard plinths and worked into poses mid-flight, the slave orcs had the feet manacled to form a chain gang.

The backstory of the army was that the Ironcaster had taken his best creations and slaves north in search of more lesser-beings



Ben, in costume for commanding his forces

to capture and bring back for servitude. The terrain is rough and often hit by snow storms, remnants of surface towns barely visible under mounds of snow. Miss Bruce, the Archfiend, always up for the destruction and torture of humans, brings his retinue of Flamebearers. They, dragging along the Brazier of Hapish, use the heat of the evil flame to fight off chill which the North Wind brings.

As for performance, they did ok. There is little shooting in this list but as a whole, it is quite fast. I ended up placing 11th out of 62 players with one of the lower attrition scores for the bracket – it seemed that it was better at winning through objectives rather than killing the enemy… which kind of fits the theme; a dead opponent can't be used as a slave (not counting the undead).

I plan on continuing to build the army up to try out different playstyles. Already planned is a Supreme Ironcaster on Great Winged Halfbreed, an Overmaster on Great Abyssal dragon, more slave orcs (both on foot and mounted), more golems, and Abyssal Berserkers – if Mantic release the figures again.

My main project for next year's Clash of Kings is to complete the Herd army I started a while back. Every figure has been converted in some way in an attempt to make them "fancy". Think bowler hats, top hats, judge's wigs and giant gavels just to name a few examples

-Bensome (from the Direct Misfire podcast) ▪

Ben Kartall

AT WHAT PRICE

By Donn Turner

Ianel and Elizabet stood quietly in the middle of the windblown street. Once, there had been life here. The commotion of the market square. The clamor of the blacksmiths beating on their anvils. The laughter of children.

Now, there was only the sound of the north wind gently playing with the dry leaves of autumn. Instead of breathing some life back into the grey stillness of the ruined city, the crisp crackle of the dry leaves only seemed to reinforce the feeling this was no longer a place for the living. This was a place of loss. Of regret. Of death.

"Why do you torture yourself so?" Elizabet whispered, finally breaking the long silence.

"Humph…I could ask you the same thing." Ianel replied.

"I come here, because I know that you will be here." Elizabet said with a little sadness in her voice.

"Am I that predictable?" Ianel Asked.

Human Cavalry by "Daedle"

Kingdoms of Men Spearmen by Andre Kritzinger

"No. You are many things, my old Master, but predictable is not one of them. You are too…good…for our profession." Elizabet replied.

"Ha! How can you say that? Especially here, of all places?" Ianel retorted.

"Because, unlike so many of us, you feel. It is your one weakness. You care about those around you. You care about the ones that get hurt. Especially the…children…"

"That's enough!" Ianel interrupted.

"I…I'm sorry…" Elizabet apologized as she lowered her gaze to the old cobblestone street.

"…No…No, it is I that should be apologizing to you, my…my…my old friend. I am sorry for raising my voice. I am…sorry…that I dragged you here so many times before. I am sorry that you had to witness the site of my biggest…failure." Ianel struggled.

"Ianel…you cannot blame yourself for this any longer. You had no choice. You know that." Elizabet replied.

"I…I was so…sure, that we could stop him. I was so convinced of our…righteousness." Ianel admitted.

"He was a beast. A monster. You were right to put him down. If you hadn't…his disease would have spread." Elizabet countered.

Kingdoms of Men Standard Bearer and Hero by "imm0rtal reaper"

"Maybe. But...I...I fear...that...once you know the whole truth of it, you may not be so forgiving." Ianel struggled.

"What more is there to know? You are an Inquisitor. A Master of the Order, no less. It is your sacred duty to hunt down and destroy the filth that plagues our world. He was a threat. A perversion. It was your duty to destroy him." Elizabet pressed as she drew near Ianel.

"Yes. Yes, that is so. But, I never told you the whole story." Ianel admitted.

"I've read your accounts. You have told me the tale. You were praised for your efforts." Elizabet countered.

"No...I have not shared the...whole... story. Not with anyone. It is my...old wound. I thought that it would heal. With time. Maybe, with enough time, it would not hurt me so." Ianel said with obvious regret in his voice. He slowly sank down to sit on the edge of a broken stone fountain. He looked tired. Defeated.

"I am not your confessor, Ianel. I am your student. I am your peer. But, most importantly, I am your friend. Your...good friend. Please. Please tell me what hurts you so." Elizabet consoled.

"I was...young...so young...as you may remember. I had just been taken as an Apprentice by Alek. He was...such a good teacher. He inspired me, Elizabet. He was so pure. So good. The light of the Shining Ones seemed to gleam out of his eyes. He was so easy to follow. Like following the light of the sun. So full of warmth. He...he was a holy terror to his enemies. Of that, I can assure you!" Ianel remembered.

"You have always spoken of him fondly." Elizabet replied softly.

"He was...well...we had a lead. It was just a rumor, really. Someone saw a beast. You know how it is. Some farmer gets a belly full of sour wine, sees his shadow, and suddenly

the hills are alive with demons. But, we had just finished prosecuting another case, so we looked into the story. Turns out, the lead was a merchant, and not one to dismiss out of hand. So, we came here, to Northwind." Ianel remembered.

"Yes. I remember reading your account. The merchant was of noble birth, and had many years of education, did he not?" Elizabet asked.

"That's correct. He had assumed control of his family business, and was trying to live up to his obligations. He was also a pious man, being tutored by monks during childhood. We were lucky, at the start. Had Ormont not asked the lad to join his…pack… then we may have never known that there was a problem." Ianel reflected.

"What became of that merchant?" Elizabet inquired.

"He…he did not survive…" Ianel struggled.

"I'm…sorry….please continue." Elizabet encouraged.

"When we first arrived in Northwind, it was a growing little city. The demand for mammoth ivory and hides was strong at that time, and the nomad tribes wanted forged metal, so the merchants were making quite a bit of coin buying and selling. Northwind could have been great. It had everything going for it. We reasoned that this why Ormont had chosen Northwind as his hide." Ianel stated as he looked out at the vacant city.

"He was the sixth son of a failing line. He had nothing but the arrogance of station."

Kingdoms of Men Spearmen by "ManticFanBoyLAD"

A Kingdoms of Men Warband explores the Star-Struck City by Austin Peasley

Elizabet remembered.

"Yes. He was a spoiled little noble that always believed that he deserved more. Through various unsavory means, he gathered a group of outcasts and mercenaries to his banner. Selling themselves out to the worst of petty tyrants and would be kings, he amassed a small fortune. But, it was never enough. Somewhere along his travels, he acquired the power of lycanthropy. The curse only empowered Ormont to commit greater and greater acts of cruelty." Ianel said with obvious venom in his voice.

"In all of these years, I have only heard you mention his name a few times, but it is always with bitterness in your voice." Elizabet observed.

"His kind disgusts me. He could have done so much in this world. But, instead, he served only himself." Ianel fumed.

"Please continue with your account." Elizabet encouraged.

"By the time we arrived in Northwind, Ormont's little band of cutthroats had already wormed their way into the wealthier families of the city. We heard tales of wild parties, strange disappearances, and animal mutilations. It was not difficult to discern the truth of things, even for those blessed by ignorance. Ormont did little to hide his activities. Maybe he felt so emboldened by that time, he simply did not care to hide." Ianel reflected.

"If only all heretics announced themselves so openly…" Elizabet mused.

"So, we moved on him. At that time, it was only Alek, myself, and three other assets. They were good assets, but Alek was not foolish. So, we used a fake identity, and had the town guard surround the large house that Ormont and his crew were reveling in that night. We thought that if we hit them hard and fast, they would not know the danger until it was too late. Just to be sure, we had silver edged weapons and crossbow bolts." Ianel stated.

"But, it did not go according to plan. Alek was lost." Elizabet continued.

"…yes. Alek fell that night." Ianel said in an uncharacteristically small voice.

"So far, you have recounted the tale as I have heard many times. We lose friends. That is the nature of our business. You know this." Elizabet pointed out.

"Yes. Yes, we lose friends. Alek's death saddened many of his peers and associates. But, that is not what pains me so. Not for all of these years." Ianel confessed.

"You can trust me. Unburden yourself, so that we can move beyond this pain." Elizabet

Basilean Paladins by Andre Kritzinger

Kingdoms of Men Knights by "imm0rtal reaper"

urged.

"…During the strike…" Ianel hesitated.

"Please." Elizabet encouraged as she took Ianel's hand into her own.

"Alek and I had kicked in the door that barred entry into a small room. It was nothing more than the servant's quarters…" Ianel struggled.

"You can trust me. Please share your pain with me." Elizabet consoled as she gently kissed Ianel's trembling hand.

"…There was a girl…not more than 12 summers…she was so pretty. Blonde hair. Blue eyes. She was terrified. Alek moved into the room, while I blocked the door. He challenged the little girl, who cowered in fear. Alek held out his hand to keep the girl at bay, and turned to inspect a large wardrobe to his left. The little girl looked at me. So innocent. So…" Ianel stumbled.

"I'm here." Elizabet whispered.

"…She…smiled at me…her eyes…her blue eyes…they were turning yellow…" Ianel struggled.

"What happened Ianel?" Elizabet asked in a soft voice.

"…I…I could…I couldn't fire. She was just a girl! She was just a 12 year old girl!" Ianel sobbed.

"The enemy takes on many forms. You taught me that. You must know that she wasn't just a little girl." Elizabet soothed.

"…She…she pulled a carving knife from behind her dress…Alek never saw her move…it was my responsibility…I was supposed to cover him…I was supposed to protect him…" Ianel cried.

"It's OK. I'm here. I'm here my love." Elizabet sobbed as she cradled Ianel in her arms.

"…She…she moved so fast…she rammed that knife right through his breastplate…no little girl should move so fast…should be so strong…" Ianel cried.

The two Inquisitors sat for a long time in the cold. They both cried. After some time, they gradually regained their composure.

"I watched Alek fall to the floor. The little girl smirked at me, mocking my hesitation. I put a silver tipped bolt right through her forehead. When her body hit the floor, it was half girl and half wolf. I ran to Alek's side, but it was too late. With his last breath, he pulled me close, and told me to let none escape." Ianel said with no emotion.

"He was right, of course. If but one of them escaped, they could spread the curse to another." Elizabet stated.

"Yes, he was right. So, we burned them all. We were…very thorough. After that night, I dismissed the assets. They were good assets. But, they had seen enough. They had endured enough. I had them watched, of course. Just to be

By "Daedle"

sure. None of them turned. But, they never took up arms again." Ianel stated.

"And, one by one, the townsfolk left. Northwind died a slow death. Ormont killed this town with his evil. You had to do what you had to do." Elizabet consoled.

"Every year, I come to this damned place. Not out of remorse. Not out of guilt. I would burn them all a hundred times again, if I could. No. I come here, because I need to remind myself, that there is a cost to what we do." Ianel said with conviction.

"At what price?" Elizabet wondered aloud.

"Everything. The price is everything that we are. We give all in service to others. Not for praise. Not for glory. We do it, because it must be done. We pay the price for humanity's survival with our very souls. Not a single night goes by where I don't see her face. Not a single night goes by when I don't scream at myself to pull the trigger. To save him. But, I can't. He dies. And she mocks me." Ianel admits.

"The price is high. Too high. But, as you said, it must be paid." Elizabet reflected.

"I'm sorry that I brought you into this life. I'm sorry that I burden you with…" Ianel apologized.

"Hush. If you will recall, I was the one to seek you out. And, you did warn me. I just didn't listen." Elizabet interrupted.

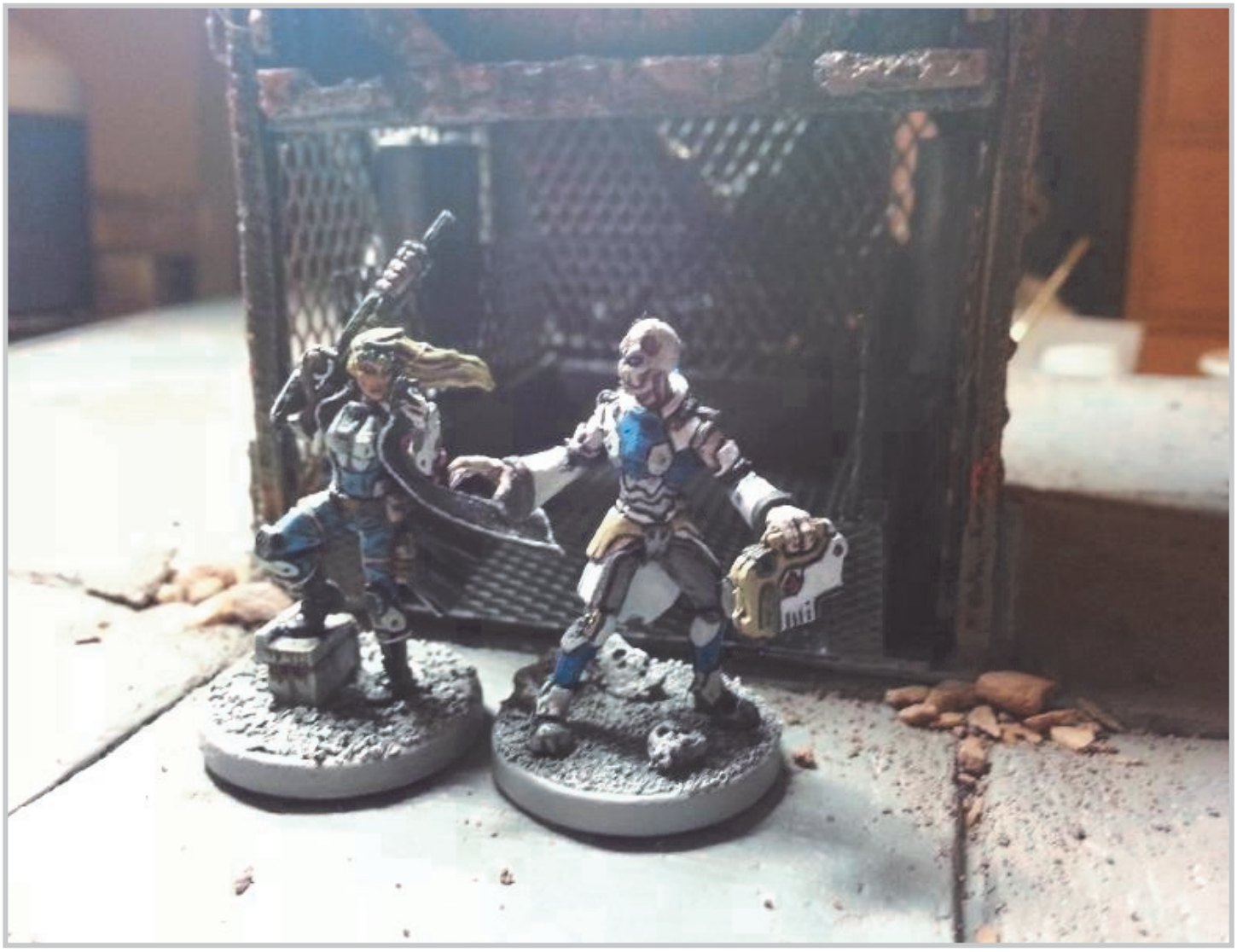
"Thank you. I just needed to…get that out. It is an old wound." Ianel said, standing.

"I am always here for you. Just as you are always here for me. You know that you are vindicated, just as Alek was vindicated. You got them all." Elizabet said, rising.

"Yes. We got them all." Ianel said, as the pair turned, and started the long walk out of the city.

Just as the Inquisitors vanished from sight down a small alley, the pale moonlight was caught in the yellow eyes of a large black beast.▪

Kingdoms of Men Spearman by "ManticFanBoyLAD"



Reb Commander and Judwan Medic by Jamie O'Toole

ULTRASONIC

Part 1

By Sebastian Pietrzak

In the dusty gloom of an abandoned tunnel, a three man team of soldiers continued their lazy patrol of the underground corridors below the residual hub. Since nothing here could be regarded as a "tempting target" for saboteurs or vandals, they roamed the corridors at ease, and joked easily. As the soldiers marched on, their shod boots rang out gracelessly upon the steel floor, while their carelessly slung weapons knocked rhythmically against the rest of their kit.

The soldier's overconfidence, which bordered on negligence, caused the soldiers to fail to notice another pair of eyes peering out of the darkness. Crouching motionless, nestled in the comfortable gap between the heating pipes, was a lone Veer-myn. Twitching slightly every time the soldier's boots rang out an unpleasant tone on the metal floor, the Veer-myn waited impatiently for the Humans to leave the area. The Veer-myn had used this route several times by

now, and already knew, more or less, the routine. He knew that he wouldn't be seen as he approached the production halls and power stations.

These were Burrus' favorite places to rest and listen. The constant, rhythmic, patter of pistons stamping. The torn, sloppy hiss of steam spouting. That was his kingdom. Concealed between the machinery, he would be hidden from any prying eyes or surveillance systems. Sozzled by the background noise, Burrus would sleep like a pup.

As Burrus approached one of his favorite resting places, he noticed that something was not right. The Humans were everywhere. Several technicians were attending mechanisms, and they were clearly agitated. Leaders of the Human herd were shouting orders with shrill voices, often shaking with excitement. Or was it fear? Burrus did not understand the unpleasant Human language well, but his limited knowledge was enough to deduce some meaning. The Humans had been attacked on the surface, and were trying to prepare some sort of defense here.

Remembering the orders of the Brood Mother, Burrus guessed it was Lugens' pack that had assailed the Human outpost. Knowing their biochem inclinations, Burrus smiled. Veer-men employed night raids, preceded by a heavy barrage, to keep the Humans occupied in an inefficient exchange of fire. All the while, the real threat crossed the no man's land, and sprayed enemy positions with caustic liquids. These chemicals reacted with oxygen while still airborne, and would instantly melt everything they touched. Metal would fizzle and collapse upon itself. Exposed skin would quickly condense and evaporate with a sough. Unfortunate victims usually looked quietly in disbelief for a few seconds, before uttering a cry of unbelievable pain. The cry would soon die out, along with its owner.

Reb strike force by Paul Mullis

Looking at the commotion, Burrus was not so sure about the outcome of the battle above the ground. The Humans were not running amok. They had their respective duties and orders, and were clearly trying to prepare something. Deciding to listen to his intuition, Burrus did not leave the area in search of a more desolate place to rest. Instead, he stayed to listen.

Burrus found a more comfortable position, pricked up his ears, and watched the commotion near one of the heating pumps. Human technicians began to roll out bundles of cables, and attached them to one of the large devices. As soon as the coupling was completed, they began to flip switches, adjust valves, and pull levers. All of these seemingly random actions brought the machine to life. Burrus was drowned in a wave of sounds, as the area came alive.

Pumps began gurgling as if pumping water. Giant fans began their thumping rotation slowly, only to speed up, and suck heat from some canal below. Dust particles and small pebbles began a quick ascent, swirling, whizzing, and tapping on metal rotors as they travelled all the way up. Somewhere inside the machine, coiled inductors, each length of fully grown rat man, began to collect heat, quickly becoming red-hot and sizzling sharply. Finally, the machine revealed its purpose. All of these primal forces were harnessed and transformed into raw energy, which began a journey through the cables to an unknown destination above the ground.

To Burrus' sensitive ears, all of these sounds combined to create an irresistible music. Unconsciously reacting to the rhythm, the unseen Veer-myn began to wag his tail. Soon, Burrus had begun to tap his claws on closest surface, matching the subtle rhythm of the machine orchestra.

Suddenly, all of the lights in the room dimmed, almost to the point of fading. The machinery began to transfer energy to its unseen destination at neck breaking speed, and the subtle hum changed into a mad howl. Even through the tens of meters of material that separated him from the surface, Burrus was able to hear an unbelievable roar of energy. After a few seconds, the phenomena stopped, along with the machinery.

The Humans began to move again. Some of them had grabbed fire extinguishers, and were trying to cool down parts of the cabling. It had become red-hot, and was on the verge of melting. Anticipating the end of the show, Burrus withdrew deeper into the shadows. Before he retreated to make plans for his pack, Burrus cast one last hungry look at the amazing device.

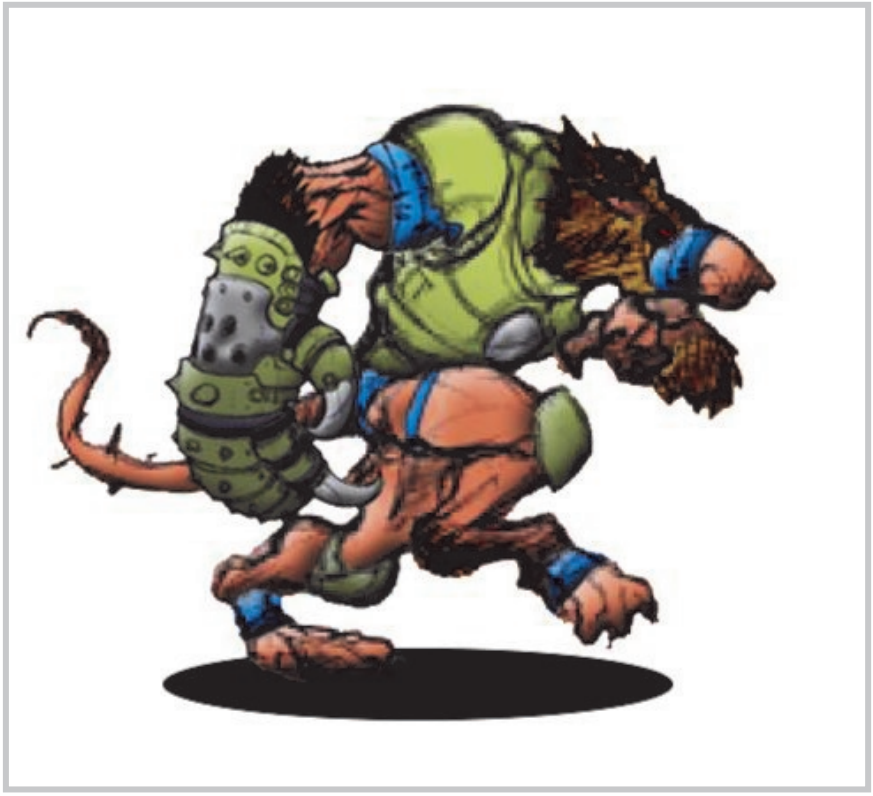
***

"Mr. Tarczynsky, if you please, spare me a moment?" The hoarse voice of Space Port commander Adam Kovalsky halted the Comms Specialist in place.

Reb Grogan by "Toulouse Miniatures"

"I know I gave you a free hand regarding the analysis of rat's behavior, but I would like for you to provide me with some more details on what you already know, and what your suspicions are."

"Of course, sir. As you know, over the course of the last 7 days, we have encountered 24 acts of hostility of some kind. At least 7 of them were theft or vandalism caused by Veer -myn, which was confirmed by surveillance. There were also 4 direct attacks on our facilities. These actions were also confirmed as Veer-myn attacks. However, this information is not really the interesting part," the Comms Specialist reported. *"I mean, of course, these actions are serious, and we need to react. But, there is other footage of rather peculiar rat behavior. These incidents cannot be directly linked to the hostilities that we talked about in today's briefing. However, I think that I'm starting to see a pattern."*



Veer-myn by Geoff Burbidge

"That's pretty vague. Can you give me something more concrete?" Kovalsky asked.

"Right away. Yesterday's attack on Production Hall PH 7 seemed very inefficient and ill-planned. The enemy's barrage was highly inaccurate, until one of the rats opened the light control box, and modified something inside. After that, the lights in the hall went dark, and then switched back to life in ultraviolet mode, until the fluorescents above our positions were overloaded, and exploded.

Once turned to ultraviolet, the rat's barrage became much more accurate. You could say almost sniper like, if you consider their usual efficiency."

"Yes, I remember this in the report. There is something mysterious to it, you're right." Kovalsky replied.

"What's more, is that I've seen a few times where lone Veer-myn were standing in seemingly random corridors. They were doing nothing at all, or so it seemed. I would like to focus on such occurrences, to see if they might have any correlation to other cases. I've seen at least one such session of "doing nothing" take place near a facility that was attacked not long after," the Comms Specialist said.

"Well, I'm no xenobiologist, but the rat looked rather agitated when it disappeared into that maintenance shaft at the end," Kovalsky stated. He exhaled deeply before speaking again. *"Well, it's a mystery... but, in*

Deadzone firefight at Adepticon 2015, courtesy of Mantic Games

my experience, if you have a hunch, it's worth pursuing. Alright, crack on. I expect a report in 6 hours. Dismissed."

* * *

Soldiers were moving swiftly and silently through the underground corridors. Underslung flashlights on their weapons constantly swept the pathway in front of them, behind, above, and on the sides where entrances to the maintenance shafts might be. They knew the enemy they might encounter: the stealthy and dexterous rat men were well known for their ambush tactics, often utilizing narrow pathways usually overlooked by humans.

Surveillance cameras had detected Veer-myn activity in this underground facility earlier. This squad was dispatched to intercept one of these groups and eradicate the vermin, to give a clear sign for others to stay away.

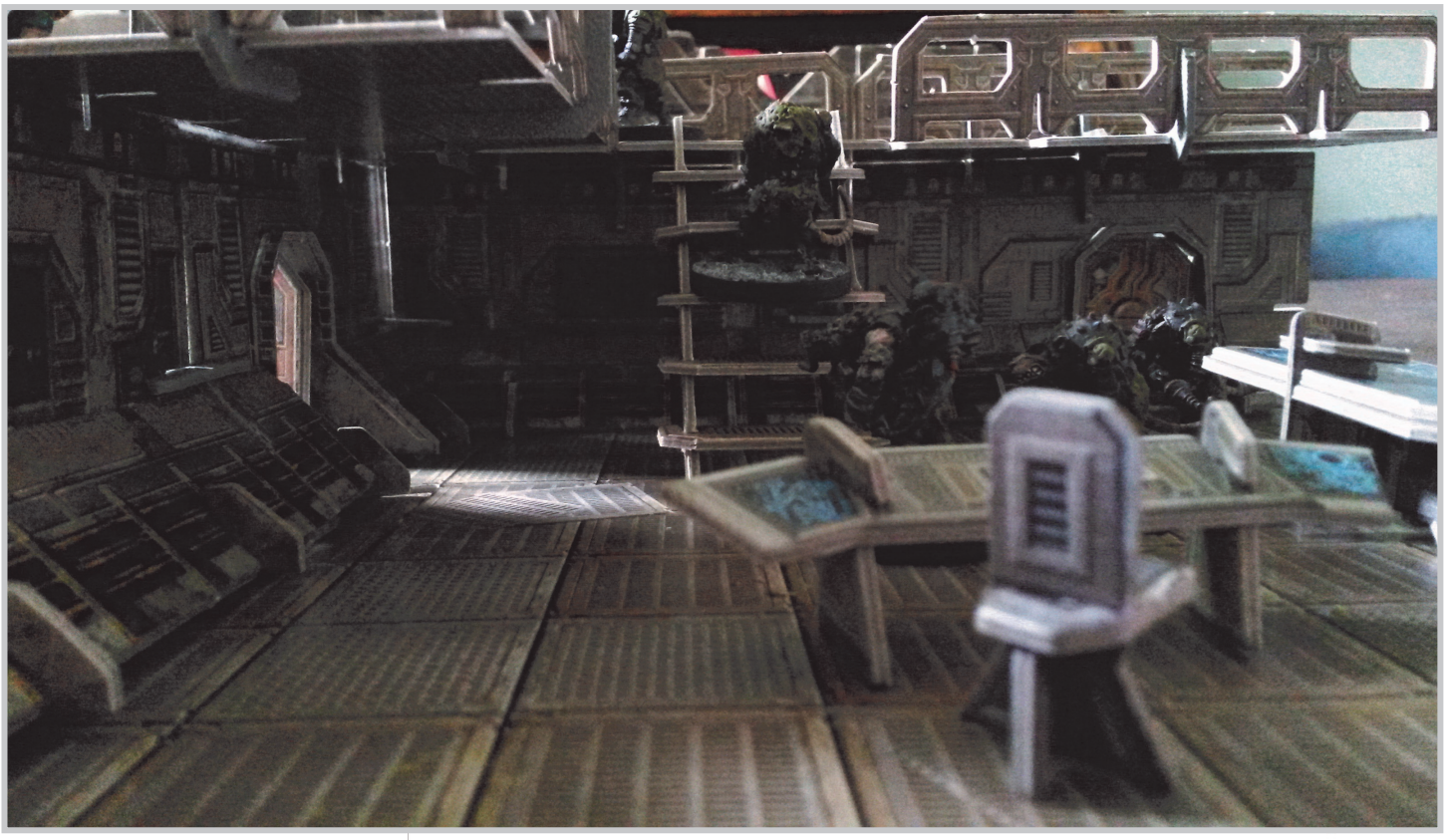
Once near the target location, the soldiers turned off their flashlights and gathered in a defensive formation, taking preassigned positions and scanning the area. It was a huge warehouse, crammed with tall containers, water and fuel reservoirs, and stacked crates. Observation of the whole room was out of the question – it was a true maze. Once fully operational, all menial work here was done by mechanical servitors using magnetic chips on containers as signposts. For now, however, the warehouse was not in use, and its robotic denizens sat on the

outskirts of the maze, gathering dust.

The troopers scanned the area for immediate threats. Not spotting any Veermyn outside of the maze, they soon realized they would have to venture inside to get them. Not wanting to break the silence and notify the enemy about their presence here, the lieutenant gave the orders in sign language. Everyone in the squad checked their weapons, ammo, and combat knifes. One of them, the one carrying a flamethrower, was surrounded by his squad mates. In narrow confines of the maze that awaited them and against such swarming enemies, a roaring cone of fire was the most effective weapon they had at their disposal. He clicked something on the weapon, and a small flame ignited below the barrel. Another trooper, the strongest of the group, was carrying a heavy burst laser which he removed from his back and mounted on a tripod with a quiet click. Then he attached a portable energy cell to it, which began to hum softly as it transferred energy to the weapon. Finally, he turned on the proximity warning systems, sat heavily on the ground, and focused on covering his squad on the move.

The soldiers arrived at the entrance to the labyrinth, and without pause they ventured

Enforcer with heavy weapon by "C.M. Minis"



Flanking Veer-myn by Paul Mullis

inside. Finally, they reached the first turn and disappeared from the sight of their colleague with the heavy weapon.

Inside, the squad began crawling through the endless turns. Every time they reached the crossroad or a split, the lieutenant would consult the plans he had on the HUD display of his tactical helmet, and would choose the way forward; their assumption was the Veer-myn were gathering at the heart of the labyrinth, so he followed the course leading them ever closer.

Suddenly the point man raised his clenched fist, immediately halting the entire team. The silence hung in the air for a long minute, and the lieutenant was about to give the order to move out again, when they all heard something. A jarring sound of metal scratching metal. It felt as if someone was pulling something on metal floor tiles. However, the sound was weak and the acoustic properties of the maze made it impossible to assess from where the sound was coming or how far away the source was. The forward soldier looked at the officer while pointing the way he guessed the sound was coming from; the lieutenant nodded with approval and the unit took off.

Soldiers began slowly following along the labyrinth towards the beckoning sound. Once again, the column stopped. They all heard it without the signal from the point man: in the distance, they could hear intermittent whirring sounds, as if someone was playing with the driller – turning it on and off. However, the sound was coming from different direction than the scratching.

As the lieutenant didn't want to split the group, he ordered the team to resume marching towards the original target. After a

while he requested a report from the rear guard.

It never arrived.

He ordered the group to halt again. Seconds later, they realized one of them was missing. The rear guard was absent and was not responding on team's radio frequency. As a check-up, commander contacted the heavy gun sentry – he was still there, reporting no enemy activity.

Now suddenly tense, the soldiers moved out towards their initial goal yet again, even more cautiously this time. They had just lost a man with no-one noticing. Not a single sound was made when one of them was abducted. Only a scratching noise in the distance and jerky sounds of drills coming from…

The soldiers suddenly realized the sounds were now coming from multiple directions and distances – some getting closer with each passing second. Even more drillers could be heard every few seconds, every time distorted by acoustics of the maze they were in. They couldn't tell exactly which corridor led to which whizzing sounds, which alley led to which scratching sounds, sounds of claws scrawling an ominous message for them.

The feeling of being surrounded overtook the whole squad. They instinctively took the defensive positions in a circle to cover all possible lanes of attack. Sounds of their steel -clad boots, rustling of their uniforms and clicking of weapons being reloaded – they all were drowned out by the maddening sounds of dozens of drills coming from all around them.

By Marcel Popik

By Chris Schlumpberger

Suddenly all was quiet. Every noise disappeared, every drill stopped its furious rotation. The silence was so sudden and deep, they could hear their frightened hearts beating and blood pulsing through their veins. Cold sweat doused them, hands began to shake, and chapped lips yearned for a nervous lick.

Without warning they were assailed by the cacophony of howls, squeaks, and roars of the drills. All around them Veer-myn emerged from the shadows, hideouts in crates and concealed maintenance shafts. A few even jumped from the tall stacks of containers in almost suicide attack.

The vermin tide crushed in on them from all directions. Only veteran instincts and training allowed them to react quickly enough to use their weapons. Laser rifles hummed and shrilled when firing energy lances into the living tide of fur. A few rats were hit and their burning pelage fizzled under the extreme heat of laser beams; the creatures howled with pain and anger but did not stop their charge.

Their commander had enough time to contact their rear guard and shout a warning. Before he received a reply, the soldiers overrun, and all they could hear were the roaring melodies of weaponized mining drills.

To be continued▪

Enforcer Peacekeepers by Cedric Boudoya

EXHAM IV: IRONBREAKER

By "redemption"

The dull thud of weapons fire carried well through the thinning atmosphere of Exham IV. For hours now the shots had interrupted the frantic peace in the station, but there had been no word from anyone yet as to why all shuttles had been cancelled. Only that they were to remain where they were until further notice. It was clear now to everyone in the station that something terrible was happening outside the walls of Space Port Salvation. In fact, something terrible had been happening on Exham IV for quite some time. In its past the planet had been incredibly resource rich owing to collisions with other planetary bodies in its formative years. Following its discovery and the very literal bidding war that followed, Mi -Gan corporation had emerged the victor and turned the planet into an industrial mining center.

Twelve cycles ago Exham IV had almost collided with a rogue planet hurtling through space, resulting in a catastrophic orbital shift

away from the systems star. The terrible ice age had slowly put an end to all mining operations on the planet as conditions rapidly deteriorated. Much of Exham IV was now abandoned, the vast urban areas and enormous mining colonies that were once home to billions were now left seemingly empty and devoid of life. All urban areas that is, except Transit Station 'Salvation'. The transit station was a mid-sized space port with 3 launch bays built into the central structure that acted as landing platforms for shuttle craft that took travelers to and from Priory orbital station. What was left of Exham IV's population had dubbed the place Salvation, as it had been the only remaining transit station on the planet for some time.

White Talon Security, a leading name in private force application, had deployed Marine company D-7 'Ironbreakers' on Exham IV one cycle ago. Led by the enigmatic Major Vaughn, their orders had been to supervise the security situation developing around the space port. This high-profile contract was brought on by the outbreak of a new plague on the already dying planet. The sickness began with severe subconjunctival hemorrhaging. Eventually hypovolemic shock set in. The victim would then drown in their own dissolving lung tissue; thus, the disease had been dubbed the 'bleeding sickness'. Those under the age of 12 or over the age of 65 seemed to carry the virus but very rarely died from it. The rest of the population weren't so lucky, resulting in an 80% fatality rate. Despite all attempts at medical intervention the virus was still decimating the population, turning the planet into a refugee crisis.

Enforcer Defender by Adam Morrow

Most of the company were billeted at the still bustling and profitable orbital station Priory, their presence reassuring the hundreds of ships that passed through Priory every week on their way to the outer systems. With them were 3 full strength battalions of Mi-Gan troopers who performed the day to day security operations for the station. The terms of the contract had been simple; to supervise Mi-Gan operations and deal with any situations the less well trained battalions couldn't handle. Having spent a year since the outbreak on the planet evaluating the performance of the Mi-Gan marines, Major Vaughn had ordered all officers including those on planet to report to Priory command center to 'politely' discuss his findings. Leaving a skeleton crew of White Cat officers to maintain order, Vaughn had put captain Walsh in command on the planet for what had supposed to be a few hours.

Three hours later, Walsh and his team had lost contact with the orbital station. In the

resulting panic the already desperate refugees had attempted to attack the outer wall, they hadn't even come close before the automated defenses along the outer perimeter had blown them to pieces. At least that was what everyone had thought, as the captain and twelve veteran white talon marines were found torn to pieces a few hours later by what seemed to be crude handmade cleavers of some kind. They were still investigating how anyone had breached the security perimeter undetected.

Approaching 30, Company Lieutenant Medford had led his platoon for the past 2 years. His field promotion to Lieutenant following the brutal fighting on Icran III was the stuff of legend. In fact, after the Forgefather Wars that followed Lieutenant Medford was one of the most highly decorated heroes of the company. Medford was a born leader, highly respected for his code of ethics and calm head in times of crisis. What the Lieutenant lacked was the company connections, rich parents or blackmail material normally required to for high level promotion in the various private military organizations that made up the Galactic Co-Prosperity Sphere Marine Corps.

This time however, Medford's position of respect in the company had earned him the rank of next in command, as the new captain was extremely dead. Fighting had continued non-stop as the survivors had tried desperately to overrun the automated defenses. The cost in civilian lives was no longer worth counting. Now he was in command of a situation that was long past his control, all he could do was hold out and hope for reinforcements.

Space port Salvation was a 400-foot-tall carbon-steel sphere, coated in a blast proof

Deadzone Plague attack by Nicodemus Sandberg

Tiger Corps by Marcel Popik

protective glass sheath that reflected the three concentric walls surrounding the station. The walls had been repurposed by the security forces, and now functioned as security barricades and quarantine containment centers. The outer wall of the facility had been modified many cycles ago to separate the residential slums outside the transit station from the hotels turned refugee camps within the outer rings. Exham IV was for all intents and purposes a dead planet now, it's entire population dedicated to leaving the system for a better life elsewhere or resigned to their fates amongst the cold iron rich dust of their homes.

This created an enormous logistical challenge for the station staff and White Talon. Those fortunate enough to be deemed uninfected could take residence between the outer and middle rings. This area was originally designed for travelers entering the station and still performed its primary functions, with marines and station staff ensuring only those who had been approved for travel were allowed into the station proper. The area between the middle ring and the main station barricade was packed with the recently erected cheap concrete structures. These buildings were home to the two Mi-Gan battalions and thousand strong station staff that were responsible for maintaining order in the overcrowded space port.

Medford sighed. Taking a deep breath, he began the short march from the helipad to the hastily erected forward command center. The irony of waiting for rescue from Salvation didn't escape him. But he reminded himself that there were two thousand very unlucky civilians now trapped inside Salvation's main building. Not to mention the rest of planets population that had taken refuge in the slums that had formed beyond the outer rings of the station.

"Gentlemen, we're in trouble."

The Lieutenant's tone was grave as he addressed his newly improvised command structure. "We all know what a planetwide nav shutdown protocol means." The veterans stared intently at the officer in front of them, already knowing what he was about to say. "The Council of Seven has grounded the planet. What that means for us is that we're stranded on a frozen iron-oxide hell hole, surrounded by a diseased and desperate population who have suddenly taken to throwing themselves at our metaphorical bullets."

The Lieutenant moved over to the table that stood in the center of the room. On the table stood a holographic map emitter that contained live relay feeds of the surrounding space port. The Lieutenant tapped in the authorization codes via the command device at his wrist, quickly bringing up the live feed holograph of Salvation. The red warning symbol flashed above the display, acting as a grim reminder that the feed from orbital station was absent. Beckoning the soldiers to the table, he moved the projection into focus around the outermost ring..

Activation of the live feed revealed the carnage unfolding below. From beyond the wall Medford and his command could see hundreds of unreadable targets attempting to engage with the automated turrets and marines stationed along the barricades. Riot demographic software had flagged the engagement, and had deployed the turrets lining the outer walls to return fire with high caliber explosive munitions. This barely registered with the lieutenant, or the other marines present whose eyes were drawn to the enormous red alert covering the northern sector of the outer wall. A flurry of symbols and warning rushed across the projection, warning of heightened distressed levels from the crowd. The marines didn't need the warning symbols to see what was happening. The display above them showed hundreds of thousands of desperate potential infected had gathered since nav-transmissions had ceased. Medford didn't need tactical overlay to understand what was happening. They were preparing to break through the wall, or die in the attempt.

Enforcer by Matthew Beer

Muttered curses began to fill the room. The handful of them had been forced to take charge of the hundreds of marines stationed at salvation, now they were facing a full scale planetary uprising. Comms chatter accompanied the panicked voices that filled the room as the marines stationed on the outer wall requested further orders. Medford raised his fist, the sudden movement of the acting station commander took the assembled men and women by surprise, ushering silence into the room. "I want at least 4 Mi-Gan platoons stationed on that wall-" The command radio strapped to his shoulder came to life before he could finish. "Sir this is Corporal Reeves, acting Q4 command, What the hell are you boys doing? I mean- sorry to interrupt 'sir' we need command to outer wall Q4 ASAP."

The Lieutenant smiled. Reeves had served under Medford for 2 years now; he was a

good soldier and friend that always spoke his mind. Occasionally though, that also meant using his skillset to hack command frequencies he shouldn't even be aware of, to relay said thoughts. "We know corporal, sit tight. Keep the marines in cover and let the robots do their job." He looked up at the men in front of him and prepared to give orders. "Cavalry incoming."

Medford finished relaying commands to the troops from his seat on one of the Standard Pattern GCPS Hornet Transport ships on standby close to the station building entrance. Soaring above the outer walls, the hornet performed a high-altitude surveillance maneuver over the desperate ocean of bodies forming below. Digital enhancement from the relay feed was one thing, but holograms left no room for instinct. The crowd was wreathed in the dust cloud formed by their numbers, meaning the only effective reconnaissance was from the air. Even at this height Medford could smell the violence in the atmosphere, yet he struggled to understand the scale of what was happening. What could have driven these people to such madness? There was no way all of them could be infected, but a gathering like this was a feast for blood disease and suicide for everyone else.

There was something here that didn't add up, he was sure of it. Medford closed the observation port and stood from his seat, using the handles that lined the transport compartment to steady himself, he made his way to the cockpit. "I've seen enough. Bring us down on top of the wall over there." He gestured to the landing platform where he had ordered Reeves and the rest of the White Talon troops already at the walls to gather.

GCPS Ranger by Christian Schlumpberger

As the Hornet began its descent, Corporal Reeves couldn't help but think that the trumpets of heaven might sound a lot like the thrum of those wing mounted propellers. The corporal had the long thin nose, handsome features and tightly trimmed beard typical of his core world heritage. Despite his youthful face and notorious sense of humor, at twenty-six years old Corporal Reeves could easily have passed for a man in his 30's. "Have a nice trip Medford?" The lieutenant sighed as he jogged down the ramp past the troops assembled below. "That's lieutenant to you core-shine". Reeves laughed, "You're not going to like this 'lieutenant', but it's only me, Brooks and seven of the newbies stationed here. Oh, and about four hundred Mi-Gan. So, it's ten to ten thousand I guess." Medford struggled not to laugh at the reactions of the assembled Mi-Gan troopers. He found it hard to argue with the corporal's assessment.

Even the newest White Talon recruit was a veteran of at least four years with an exemplary record. So he knew these men were battle hardened at least; their pay and equipment reflected that fact. White Talon protective gear was state of the art, and the reinforced carbon-fiber armor plating of their armor was adorned in the uniform white of their employers. The red insignia on their helmets marked their platoon and company assignment.

Even the black company-issue under-armor that covered the rest of their bodies was engineered for sub-zero combat conditions and was inlaid with the ballistic resistant fibers and Nano-circuitry which linked to their helmet visors, providing advanced

GCPS Marines by Liam Markey

Reb Human Trooper by Jamie O'Toole

tactical overlay. The mass produced standard issue black armor and outdated rifles that the rest of their comrades were equipped with seemed stone age by comparison. It reflected the poor training and equipment standards Mi-Gan corporation had employed until now. Not that he blamed the troops for their inexperience, nearly all of them had only joined the corporation security forces to secure a trip off world for them and their families when they were done.

Medford acknowledged Brooks with a nod. "We sure this is everyone?" Brooks didn't return the gesture, instead finishing the sight adjustments on her rifle before she replied. "Fraid so mon capitaine" Medford sighed, he had long since given up trying to engage with the standoffish markswoman. Instead he called for attention from the assembled soldiers.

"Ok boys and girls, you each get 40 of Exham's finest. I want 800 meters of overlapping fire on the causeway. Mark your scopes. From what I can see they're going to try and rush the gates and batter them down somehow; it's the only explanation I have for this madness." He turned to address the Mi-Gan troopers now, softening his tone. "Chances are no one is going to have to take a single shot, the turrets will do their work before they even get close. But this is about as big a crowd as you greenhorns can imagine, so I want us all prepared for the worst. White Talon is in command for this operation, see your handlers for orders. Move out!"

It took minutes for the marines to get to their position. Autocannons and riflemen now lined the barricades, ready to support the automated defenses. The cloud of dust was edging closer now, obscuring the mob's advance. It began with a trickle at first, like pebbles on a mountain. One after the other groups began to charge out of the dust, screaming incoherently before being pushed back by the withering hail of explosive munitions from the turret defenses. Eventually Medford made his address. "Civilians, stand down and await processing approval. Any attempts to breach the perimeter will be met with deadly force."

As if in reply a great shriek filled the air, taking the lieutenant by surprise. Before Medford's brain could recognize the

Enforcer Strider by "C.M. Minis"

distinctive screech, another sound pierced the air. The throng charged forward all at once, and the battle for Space Port Sanctuary began.

The marines opened fire at the 800-meter mark. A flurry of laser fire rained down from the riflemen along the walls, taking a bloody toll on the first wave of bodies. Moments later the gore-soaked thoroughfare was set ablaze as the marines unleashed their heavy weaponry. From the walls, the sound of the automatic weapons fire was barely loud enough to muffle the screams of the dying. Medford watched in growing horror as the crowd charged on regardless, possessed by some madness. At 600 meters the automatic defenses reset their targeting parameters. Ignoring the unidentified weapons fire attempting to distract the defenders, they turned their attention on the crowd below. Thousands died in minutes, but this wasn't enough to slow the tide. By now the force of the crowd was too much for those in the front to resist as they tried desperately to flee the killing ground. At the 500-meter mark, tears streaming down his eyes, Medford drew his rifle and joined the marines with controlled bursts of fire from his weapon. At 400 meters, as he began to reload for the second time he could see Brooks and Reeves franticly yelling down the

speaker system. It was impossible to hear what they were saying above the roar of heavy weapons fire, but the pain in their eyes told Medford all he needed to know.

At 300 meters the tidal wave that had set upon the space port finally began to break against the hail of fire from the defenders as they brought their grenade launchers to bear. The impetus of the charge had broken. Now the mob of infected had devolved into pockets of desperate survivors taking cover amongst the fresh craters lining the causeway. Most of the marines, weapons spent, were slumped against their barricades in various states of shock, unable or unwilling to process what they had done. Medford ran to Brooks, grabbing the intercom radio from her shaking hands. He climbed atop the barricade in full view of the crowd below, a black silhouette against the setting sun. Medford screamed down the speaker system. “Retreat you idiots! Stop this insanity!” Minutes went by without reply from below, the marines had stopped firing into the crowd but without any sign of retreat Medford was forced to keep the automated defenses active suppressing the rest of the infected. As the distant star illuminated the scene unfolding below, the automated defenses at their position began to shut down one after the other, munitions either spent or barrels overheated. With the thud of the weapons gone, an eerie silence filled the air.

Another shriek filled the air from somewhere in the dust beyond. If the infected below were already desperate, now they were frenzied with panic. Many of them rushed forward, seeing their opening and crowding at the gate. The horror of realization dawned on Medford as the civilians below pounded the steel of the closed security gate. This time he had recognized the screeching cry. Before he could speak the words, the world below was washed away under a tsunami of amber yellow and dark fur.

The creatures that burst from the ruins of Exham IV raced on bipedal legs. Humanoid only in the roughest sense, they each had an extra joint below the knee and vicious claws

Marauder Trike by ‘Daedle’

that tipped the dark matted fur of their limbs. This evolutionary advantage gave them incredible speed as the horde descended on the surviving infected. Many tried to flee along the no man's land to the side of the causeway, seeking the shelter of the buildings meters away. Those same buildings stained crimson by the sunset, released their deadly contents onto the fields surrounding salvation.

Elongated rodent like skulls and jaws filled with filthy yellow fangs tore into flesh while crude laser weapons fired haphazardly into the panicked crowds. With the defenses interrupted, the marines could do nothing but watch the massacre unfold before them. The deep pang of the alien lasers had confirmed the lieutenant's worse fears. He had fought these creatures before; on Icran III, they had taken to calling the strange weapons ray-guns. The creatures that carried them were part of the largest infestation he had ever seen. Behind the wall, enormous mining drills began to erupt from beneath the surface, unleashing their deadly payload across the station. Medford leapt from his position as the first of the beam weapons hit the barricade, landing amongst the soldiers he rallied the stunned troopers. "Retreat!" He yelled, sprinting down the barricade. He set his transmitter to

Forgefather fortification by Peter "Tek Thornisson"

Enforcer Pathfinder by Loic Boudoya

all frequencies "All forces retreat to the inner wall, lift the processing and bring everyone you can into the inner ring. It's the Veer-Myn!"

When orbital station Priory received grounding protocol instructions White Talon forces had been put on full alert. At the time an apparent technical error had left the officers isolated in the command room, meaning White Talon marines were tasked with guarding the command vital operations of the station until command operation were restored. Meanwhile, the hundreds of Mi-Gan troops around the station had been remotely tasked with isolating all non-essential personnel to their ships or quarters. Despite this, the Veer-myn assault had still taken them all by complete surprise. They were everywhere in seconds, cutting through the surprised defenders with uncanny speed and savagery. They came at them from the vents, from the maintenance corridors and the container holds stored all over the orbiting station. Brutal fighting erupted around the station as isolated groups fought desperately for survival.

Approaching his mid-forties, Sergeant Tanner was just about sick and tired of fighting for his life. Unleashing a furious torrent of napalm death from the flamer at his hip, his laughter was the only reply to the shrieks of the Veer-myn that filled the hallway. The stench of burning metal and singed fur filled the sergeant's lungs. Tanner lowered the flamer at his hip, grinning to the shocked mi-gan troops "Extra crispy boys, that's how you cook a rat!" he said. Not content to sit and guard the defunct communications room, Tanner had taken his 10 marines into the thick of the fighting, picking up as many Mi-Gan troopers as they could along the way. The immediate hallway in front of them cleared of the brightly armored bipedal creatures, the sergeant addressed the men. "Now here's what we're gonna do. We're gonna burn, shoot and stab our way to the armory just ahead. *Then we're gonna save those core-shiners in the command room and get ourselves a nice bonus. Who's with me?"*

The cheer of the assembled men and women was cut short by the shrieking reply of the Veer-myn reinforcements. "You know the drill people: urban engagement fire pattern." The Sergeant turned to face the handful of survivors they had found. "Private Stan!" The Mi-Gan weapons specialist jumped to attention. "I want you and your

Deadzone firefight by Shane Knerl

boys to take those weapons of yours and melt every air vent in this corridor as we pass it, do you understand me private?" The young trooper shouted over the barrage of the marines just ahead "Yes sir!". Tanner had put him in charge of the rear guard a few minutes earlier, as his name was the easiest to remember.

The Veer-myn charge lost its momentum under the hail of coordinated laser fire. With no cover to be had in the long corridor the marines had the advantage over the poorly equipped creatures, who were once again forced back by the steady advance of Tanner's marines. "Just a few more meters, then the door is on the right. Private how're we doing back there?"

"Doing fine Sir! Got a couple before they could jump out of the vents!" The sergeant whooped in delight.

"Hell yes Private, that is what I like to hear!". Meter by meter the troopers advanced down the corridor. As they passed another ventilation shaft at their feet, one of the Migan troopers moved to weld the vent shut, but this time the stalking creature inside was ready. The trooper was met with a flurry of laser fire as the creature burst from its hiding place. She fell to the ground, two cauterized

wounds beneath her shattered breastplate. Sergeant Tanner answered in kind, sending the Veer-myn soldier flying into the wall with the metal toe of his boot. One of the marines ahead finished the job, grabbing the alien's fleshy tail and shoving his pistol in its jaw.

Before his comrades could avenge the dead nightcrawler, the sergeant shoved the nozzle of his flamethrower into the exposed vent and pulled the trigger. When the squealing finally abated, the sergeant ordered the group forward again.

The Veer-myn had not expected to be on the defensive and were caught unawares by the surprise counter attack. Tanner and the group cut through the hallway, their shots racing after the unprepared nightcrawlers. When they arrived at the armory doors, the marines formed a defensive perimeter. The Mi-Gan troops moved into in the room first with the sergeant at their heads. Finding no enemy targets, the marines fell back into the room. Rifles at the ready, they backed into the room with drilled precision, firing in controlled burst that kept the Veer-myn behind cover and unable to follow. As the last of the marines fell in, two troopers moved to secure the armory door, the rest took up defensive positions facing the doorway.

Tanner opened the second blast door, revealing the hundreds of rifles and ammunition packs that lay beyond. The sergeant strode past the weapons to the green crate which was marked with the white insignia of a hawk talon holding a large caliber bullet. A fierce grin covered his face as he addressed the room. "We're still

Enforcer by Jamie O'Toole

breathing folks, good job. Pass those charge packs forward Private Stan. We're gonna need a lot of ammunition." The Sergeant opened a hatch above the container and keyed in his passcode. He gestured to the flamethrower at his hip, and then to the contents of the munitions container. "How many of you recruits know how to use a fire stick?" Unfortunately for the alien creatures massing in the hallways beyond, every trooper present raised their hands.

Vaughn ducked under the blade of the creature in front of him, the speed of the human's movements caught the alien by surprise as the wild swing took it off balance. Seeing his opening, Vaughn stepped into the night stalker's guard and took its throat in a

vice like grip. The creature's armor grasped in his other hand, the major roared in defiance and pulling at the yellow metal plates bolted to the Veer-myn's flesh. Agonized screeching flew through the room as the armor came away. splitting the creatures body almost in half. Vaughn tossed the corpse over the barricade into the crowd of stunned Veer-myn. He hadn't drawn his pistol since the fighting began; there was no need.

The Major, along with the rest of the station's command structure, had been isolated on the command deck by the Veer-myn saboteurs. While outside the command deck where the Veer-myn began their assault, the commanders of the station had been ambushed first. This kind of fighting suited the battalion: they were White Talon's void warfare specialists, and operated well in the tight confines of the station. But despite their best efforts many had been killed in the first hours of the ambush. When the marine officers had run out of ammunition, most had begun using their side arms as hand weapons, waiting for the opportunity to crack skulls or stab at exposed patches of fur and flesh. Some of the Mi-gan officers had managed to figure out how to use the weapons the aliens carried and were providing suppressing fire as best they could

Wrath ambushes an Enforcer Sniper by "C.M. Minis"

with the crude pistols. Their initiative had not escaped the colonels notice. Reading the situation, he had led the men into the control room sealing all but one entrance.

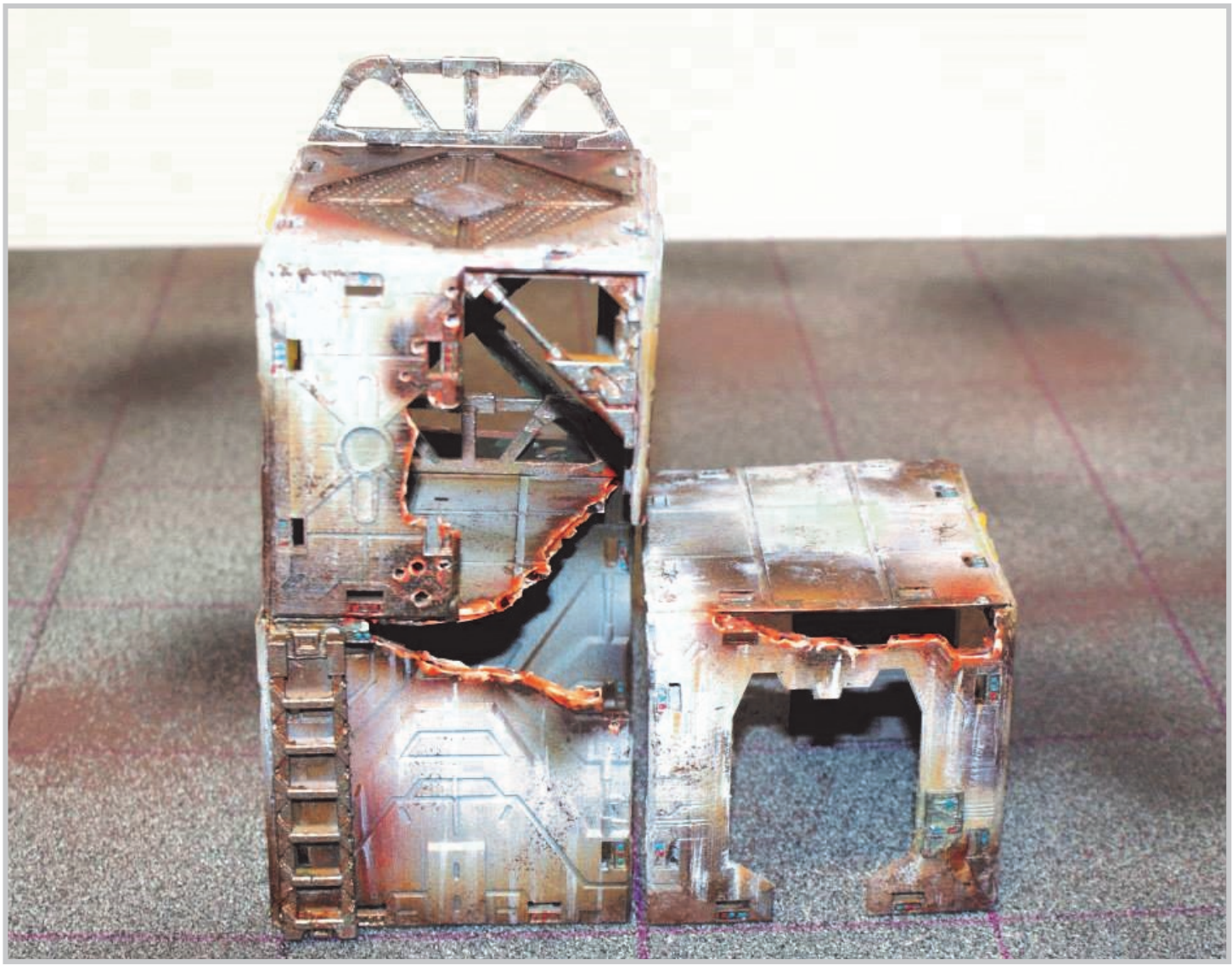
Now there was only one way for the aliens to reach them, a long well-barricaded corridor. If they wanted to breach the command room then they would have to pay for it in blood. The first few assaults had been repelled easily enough, but beyond the barricade the troops could spy another crowd of Veer-myn. This time something was different. The alien swarm parted, making a path for the hulking creature beyond.

The enormous Veer-myn was covered in thick steel plates, colored the same bright yellow as it's comrades. It shared the same rat-like features, but the size of this new beast dwarfed its lesser brethren. Heavy footfalls filled the ruined corridors of the command deck as the creature moved forward, hunched low to avoid hitting it's armored head on the ceiling of the corridor. The deck fell silent as the marines spied the creature preparing to advance on them. Without warning, the creature rushed forward, moving with the same vicious agility as the rest of the Veer-myn and taking the horrified marines by surprise. A great crash sounded from the front of the lines as the barricade broke apart.

Tiger Corps by Marcel Popik

The genetically enhanced nightmare was among them in seconds. Huge claws attached to knotted muscles tore through the nearest marine. Shrieking in delight. The beast fired up the enormous mining drill in its right hand, mauling any troops that came within range. The marines were routed by the sudden appearance of the monster and fell back en mass. Lost in blood lust the nightmare charged forward on its powerful legs, taking a bloody toll on the fleeing soldiers. What marines had escaped the initial impact fled through the corridor, ignored as the nightmare fell into a frenzy of greed, tearing into the flesh of the fallen troopers with its gore stained muzzle. It didn't take long before the nightcrawlers were hot at their heels, picking off marines with laser fire or leaping at exposed backs, terrible blades cutting into unprotected gaps in their armor.

Then the Major was amongst them, his famous beam revolver finally drawn from the holster at his hip. The deep boom of laser fire rang through the hallway with each step the commander took. One of the creatures dropped headless onto the floor, another flew back squealing at the gaping wound in its torso. The chase of the Veer-



Deadzone terrain by Paul Scott

myn faltered as they were forced to face this new threat. The closest pack member leapt from atop a dead officer to the Majors right, another shot, another step and another dead Veer-myn lay on the ground. Their faith renewed, the soldiers stood behind their commander as he strode forward. Then death rained upon the startled Veer-myn, pushing them back through the hallway, past the hulking monstrosity beyond.

The nightmare was shaken from its feeding frenzy by the sudden change of pheromone signals from the lesser Veer-myn. Alert and ready again, the colonel watched as the beast's enormous frame came hurtling through the corridor, it's massive drill aimed straight for Vaughn and his men. The soldiers watched in horror as the beast raced forward, most fled down the corridor knowing their fate should the drill come close enough. The Major stood firm and vented his laser revolver, calmly adjusting the setting on the grip. The mutated Veer-myn continued its charge down the hallway, roaring in delight. The whirring of the battle drill became deafening as the nightmare was almost upon him. The stench of blood and alien filth overwhelmed the major's senses. The nightmare was nearly close enough now to strike, exactly where Vaughn wanted it.

In a single fluid motion, he lifted his weapon and locked eyes with the creature. “I’m finished with you now, vermin.” Blue light flooded the corridor as the overcharged shot left the barrel of the Majors revolver. A surprised expression would have been painted across the creature’s face Vaughn imagined, were its head still attached. Carried forward by its momentum the corpse skidded forward, grinding to a halt at the commander’s feet.

Vaughn stepped over the steaming corpse of the dead alien and vented his pistol. “To me!” he cried and began his own charge towards the unprepared Veer-myn beyond. The sight of their champion so easily dispatched by the figure racing towards them was too much for the Veer-myn soldiers, and they fled before Vaughn and the battle cries of the rallied marines. The natural speed of the Veer-myn carried them from the battle faster than the marines could follow. Seeking strength in numbers they moved to the sabotaged blast doors that blocked the emergency stair exit of the command deck. One of the larger creatures pushed his way through the crowd, placing a strange orange device on the blast door. Moments later the door shattered, opening the path to freedom for the fleeing horde. The Veer-myn scrambled down the staircase to the deck below, happy to be free from danger for the time being. The larger creature that led the pack was first to the exit. The alien ripped the door from its hinges and the relieved Veer-myn spilled onto the deck below, where they met Sergeant Tanner and the fires of hell.

“Incoming!” Medford fell to the ground beside the men. Another focused beam flew

Enforcer Sniper by Matthew Beer

above their heads, missing it’s intended mark and blasting a hole in the wall behind them. Despite their best efforts, the battle was nearly over. They had fallen back to the second barricade with just enough time. As the night-stalkers spilled through the gates and from the ground they had reaped a bloody toll from the first wave of alien invaders, but they were not prepared for the armored assault that followed.

Great tunneling drills had erupted from the concrete beneath the walls, hailing deadly fire on the flanked defenders and trapped civilians. Behind the great tunneling machines came all manner of monstrous nightmares, giant assault troops that had ploughed through the unprepared soldiers. As he ducked beneath another blast the Lieutenant could see now that he had ordered the retreat to the final barricade too late, leaving the marines in a deadly close quarter struggle as they fought to get to safety. Fortunately the main station building still held: so far the blast proof glass coating

of the structure had proven impervious to the heavy laser weapons of the Veer-myn armor.

This was of no solace to Medford and the marines as they fought a desperate retreat to the station building. He knew it was only a matter of time before the tunneling equipment broke through the foundations. giving the creatures the opening they needed to overwhelm the beleaguered garrison. Medford could see the soldiers around him taking cover in the smoldering ruins, doing their best to return fire. But they were hopelessly outgunned and time was running out. The ground shook and the sharp tang of o-zone overwhelmed Medford's senses. Peering over the wall he could see the alien machine was preparing to fire its weapon again. This time the Veer-myn operators found their mark, 4 marines to Medford's right were vaporized as the heavy laser swept through the ruined structure, obliterating all it touched. The Lieutenant could only watch as the next vehicle came into view and opened fire. Red dust and dull ringing replaced the frantic sounds of the battle around him. For a single moment, the only sensations left were the spinning sky and the cold air against his freshly exposed skin. The impact of the concrete was the last thing Medford felt before the world went dark.

"So Major, about that pay rise we were discussing". The sergeant took a swig from his flask, laughing at the look the Major gave him. They had both stopped to catch their breath while the younger men and women finished cleaning the command deck. "What pay rise Tanner?" the Major finally replied.

"Why, they one we're discussing right now sir." The major gave the old sergeant another stern glare for a moment, but was unable to keep up the façade. They both laughed, glad to be alive after the events of the past twenty four hours. "Well Tanner, usually grunts like yourself aren't paid until the jobs done." Tanner offered the flask to his commanding officer, Vaughm gladly obliged. "And I might shoot you yet, so maybe I'll

GCPS Marines by Matt Gilbert

Deadzone Plague attack by Nicodemus Sandberg

think about it." Tanner knew that was the best he was going to get. He stood, discreetly retrieving his flask before stowing it away out of sight.

"Any further orders sir?"

The Major stood and walked over to the observation window. Staring at the planet below, he thought of the soldiers still down there. With his back still to the sergeant he replied.

"Why, first we've got a station to secure and a quarantine to override, enforcers inbound to probably try and kill us all and then we've got a planet to rescue." The Major turned to face Tanner.

"Think you're up to the task, sergeant?"▪

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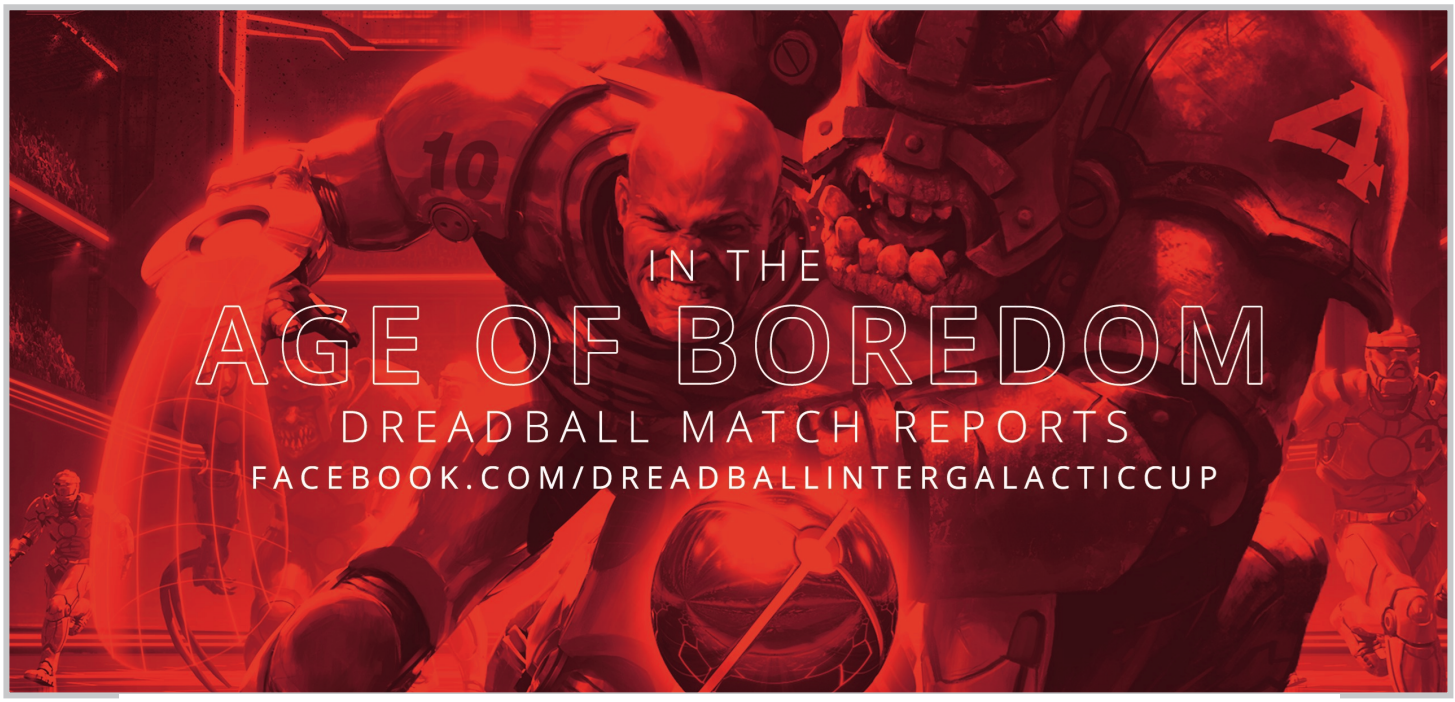

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